

Francis Apartments
4304 South Forestville Avenue
(southwest corner of South
Forestville Avenue and East 43rd Street)
Chicago
Cook County
Illinois

HABS No. ILL-1076

HABS
ILL;
16-CHIG,
74-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
801 - 19th Street N.W.
Washington, D.C.

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. ILL-1076

FRANCIS APARTMENTS

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Location: 4304 South Forestville Avenue (southwest corner of South Forestville Avenue and East 43rd Street), Chicago, Cook County, Illinois.

Present Owner: K. E. Moberley et al.

Present Use: Stores below, apartments above.

Statement of Significance: The Francis Apartment Building is an early design by Frank Lloyd Wright. One of two middle-income housing projects executed by Wright in Chicago in 1895, the building was praised by Robert C. Spencer /"The Work of Frank Lloyd Wright," The Architectural Review, (June 1900), pp. 70-71/ as follows:

"Devoid of architecturesque features and aggressive enrichment, there is a quiet, impressive dignity in the clean-cut facade of the Francis Building which gives it an enviable air of well-bred distinction among the rabble of slatternly, dowdy and illiterate 'flats' of the neighborhood. The grammar of this building is simplicity itself with the sufficient and evident preparation for structure at the base, the sheer use of uninterrupted wall surface, completed finally and gracefully in the simple rich crown with fretted sky-line."

In 1960, the building was officially named a Chicago Architectural Landmark.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Original and subsequent owners: Legal description of the property: Lots 1, 2, and 3 in Block 2 in B. F. Cronkrite and Company's Subdivision of that part of the north half, of the north half, of the northwest quarter, of the southwest quarter of section 3-38-14, east of Vincennes Road, otherwise known as lots 1 and 2 of County Clerks Division of unsubdivided lands in southeast quarter of Section 3-38-14, recorded October 15, 1889.

The following is an abstract of the complete chain of title contained in Book 327 B, pp. 42-44, in the Cook County Recorder's Office:

Susan K. Francis received the deed to the land from B. Franklin Cronkrite on September 13, 1890 (Document 1335524). The Terra Haute Trust Company is recorded to have turned the property over to James S. Royse Trustees on December 13, 1910 (Document 4678089); Royse then sold it to Henry Hogans on September 24, 1919 (Document 6629800). The building has had a complex ownership since, the name of Harry Weinstein often recurring in the record. On December 29, 1933 Mae Burke turned the title over to the Francis Building Corporation (Document 11335748). The last entry in the chain indicates that K. E. Moberley et al and the American National Bank are owners, February 1, 1949 (Document 14488484).

2. Date of erection: 1895-96.
3. Architect: Frank Lloyd Wright.
4. Original plans, construction, etc.: The original building permit recorded in Book K, Northwest - Southwest, May 1894 - December 1897 in the Chicago Department of Buildings reads as follows:

No. 2567; November 1, 1895; S. R. Francis; 4 stories, brick apartments; 84' front, 100' deep, 56' high; lots 1, 2, 3, Block 2, B. F. Cronkrite 3-38-14, Forestville Avenue 4300-6; \$39.90 amount for permit.

Wright's rendering for the building (reproduced in the Ausgeföhrte Bauten und Entwörfte (Berlin: E. Wasmuth, 1910), Tafel V: "Francis Mietshaus, Chicago) has the following inscription:

"The Francis Apartment Building built for the Terra Haute Trust Co. in 1895. Divided into three, four, and five room apartments, exterior of yellow Mreclay roman brick, cornice and dado cream white vitreous terra cotta bond stone courses, base and water table of buff bedford, finished in quartered white oak, painted walls, tiled baths, marble and mosaic entrances." [Punctuation added.]

B. Bibliography:

Ausgeföhrte Bauten und Entwörfte. Berlin: E. Wasmuth, 1910. Tafel V: "Francis Mietshaus, Chicago. Fine einfache Lösung des gewöhnlichen Wohnhaus - Problem's wie man es im Süden von Chicago im Jahre 1893 hatte."

Condit, Carl W. The Chicago School of Architecture. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1964. p. 158; pl. 122.

- Hitchcock, Henry-Russell. In the Nature of Materials. New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1942. p. 25; Fig. 31.
- Manson, Grant Carpenter. Frank Lloyd Wright to 1910. New York: Reinhold Publishing Corporation, 1958. pp. 80-81, 217; Fig. 60-perspective rendering of elevation, entry and plans.
- Siegel, Arthur (ed.). Chicago's Famous Buildings. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1965. pp. 110-13. Plan.
- Spencer, Robert C. "The Work of Frank Lloyd Wright, " The Architectural Review (Boston), June, 1900. pp. 70-71. Reissued by the Prairie School Press, 1965.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character:

"Devoid of architectesque features and aggressive enrichment, there is a quiet, impressive dignity in the clean-cut facade of the Francis Building which gives it an enviable air of well-bred distinction among the rabble of slatternly, dowdy and illiterate 'flats' of the neighborhood. The grammar of this building is simplicity itself with the sufficient and evident preparation for structure at the base, the sheer use of uninterrupted wall surface, completed finally and gracefully in the simple rich crown with fretted skyline."

/Robert C. Spencer, "The Work of Frank Lloyd Wright,"
The Architectural Review, (June 1900), pp. 70-71./

- #### 2. Condition of fabric: Fair; the exterior shows signs of wear and misuse; however, as a whole the building appears to be quite sound.

B. Description of Exterior:

- #### 1. Over-all dimensions: 88' x 75', almost square with T-shaped entry court opening to the east; four stories on raised basement.
- #### 2. Wall construction: The superstructure is set on a 3' high podium of smooth-faced ashlar; the first story has ornamental terra-cotta cladding; the stories above are of buff roman brick with very fine mortar points. The terra-cotta has been painted. On the east, there is a tripartite two story bay in each wing; on the north, there are two similar bays.

3. Structural system, framing: Mill construction.
4. Porches, stoops, bulkheads, etc.: Access to the apartments is from the east, up three steps, between flanking ornamental iron gates. At the end of the court, two rectangular one-story porches project from the corners and lead, via three steps, to the interior stairwells.
5. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: The main entrances are from the court; there are utility stairs at the rear.
 - b. Windows and shutters: There are wide, one-over-one-light double-hung windows. The first floor stores on the north have large plate glass display windows.
6. Roof:
 - a. Shape, covering: Flat, built-up roofing.
 - b. Cornice, eaves: The projecting terra-cotta cornice has a beaded band; a similar design is repeated on the coping of the porches. The frieze is a smaller-scale variant of the terra cotta cladding at the first floor level.

C. Description of Interior:

Floor plans: (Access to the individual apartments was not available at the time of this report.) Originally, there were six apartments per floor, two to the east front, one along each of the lateral sides, and two in the rear. The rear and lateral apartments were also served by the utility stairs to the west; the front apartments had similar stairs leading down to the court and the entry porches. It is not known how the interior is subdivided at present.

D. Site:

General setting and orientation: The building fronts the sidewalk line to the north and east. It faces South Forestville, primarily a residential street. To the north is East 43rd Street, a commercial thoroughfare lined with many shabby stores. The building is located in the center of one of Chicago's worst slum areas.

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